



CHAPTER XI.

The Baker's Daughter.

A large part of our ambitious American population is prone boastfully to ascribe its origin to one or other of those highly respectable, if really little known monarchs to whom is commonly accorded the foundation of old world nobilities. We have built up a pretty fiction regarding so-called blue blood, on the flatterer, but wholly unsupported supposition that royal qualities are transmissible to the third and fourth generation; so that 'tis a poor American family indeed cannot boast its coat of arms, harking back to royal days of Charlemagne or William the Conqueror. It may be. Their majesties were active, morganatically at least no doubt, much-married men!

But continually there arise disturbing instances to upset us in our beliefs regarding aristocracy. There are so very many worthless aristocrats, in whom the theory of descent did not work out according to accepted schedule; and there are so very many worthy but wholly disconcerting men who are not aristocrats—so continually do Lincoln arise who, claiming nothing of birth or breeding, show themselves to be possessed of manhood, show themselves, moreover, masters of those instincts and practices which go with the much-abused title of gentleman; a matter in which not all descendants of Charles or William join them.

It is well known among theatrical managers that no real lady can imitate a real lady. The highest salaries in ladies' theatrical roles are paid to ladies who are not ladies, but who play the parts of ladies as they think ladies really would act in actual life. If you seek a woman to carry off a gown, one to assume such really regal air as shall bring the name of William or Charlemagne impulsive to your lips, find one still owning not more than one of the requisite three generations which are set as the lowest limit for the production of a gentleman or a lady.

Continually in our American aristocracy—and in that, par consequens, of Europe—we find ladies whose fathers were laborers, shopkeepers, soap-makers, butchers, this or that, anything you like. So only they had money, they did as well as any to wear European coronets, to assist at royal coronations. And, having proved their powers in swift forgetfulness, they offer as good proof as any, of the scientific fact that gentleness of heart and soul and conduct are not things transmissible even to the third and fourth generation, either in America or Europe. Your real aristocrat perhaps after all, is made, not born.

As to Virginia Delaware, daughter of the baker, John Dahlen, in St. Louis, she started out in life with the deliberate intent of being a lady, knowing very well that this is America, where all things come to her or her who does not wait. In some way, as has been said, she had achieved graduation at a famous school where the art of being a lady is dispensed. She had, indeed, even now and then seen a lady in real life; not to mention many supposed ladies in theatrical life, playing the part as to them seemed fit, and far better than any lady could.

The soul finds its outward expression in the body. The ambition shapes the soul. It was wholly logical and natural that, having her particular ambition—that of many American girls—Virginia Delaware should grow up tall, dignified, beautiful, composed, self-restraining, kindly, gracious; these being qualities which in her training were accepted as properly pertaining and belonging to all aristocrats. We have already seen that, put to the test, in the midst of our best aristocrats—those who frequent the most highly gilded and glared hotels in New York—she was accepted unhesitatingly as of the charmed circle, even by the head waiters. Had you yourself seen her upon the Chicago streets, passing to her daily occupation, you also in all likelihood would have commented upon her as a rich young woman, and one of birth, breeding and beauty. We have spoken somewhat regarding the futility of mottoes and maxims in the case of an ambitious man. As much might be said regarding their lack of applicability to the needs of an ambitious woman. Virginia Delaware would have made her own maxims had she needed any; and had she been obliged to choose a coat of arms, she surely would have selected the Christian motto of "Onward and Upward."

The best aid in any ambition lies in the intensity of that ambition. We all are what we really desire to be, each can have what he really covets, if he will pay the price for it. In her gentleness with her associates, in her dignity and composure with her employer, in her conduct upon the street and in the crowded car, in all situations and conditions arising in her own life, Virginia Delaware diligently played the part of lady as best she could.

needed that; because she had the intense ambition to be a lady. She continually was in training. Moreover, she had that self-restraint which has been owned by every woman who ever reached any high place in history. She kept herself in hand, and she held her self not cheap. Likewise, after the fashion of all successful politicians, she cast aside acquaintances who might be pleasant but who probably would be of little use, and pinned her faith to those who promised to be of future value. Such a woman as that can not be stopped—unless she shall unfortunately, fall in love.

If there was calumny, Virginia Dare heeded it not. She accented all graciously and with dignity, as a lady should. And all this time her great personal beauty increased to such a point as to drive most of her fair associates about the headquarters offices to the verge of rage. To be beautiful and aristocratic both assuredly is to invite hatred! It is almost as bad as to be rich. Miss Delaware allowed hatred to run its course unnoted. She needed no maxims over her desk, required no ancestral coat of arms. She was an aristocrat, and meant to be accepted as such. In all likelihood—though simple folk may not read a woman's mind—she saw further into the future than did John Rawn himself.

There remained, then, as against the ambition of Virginia Delaware, the one pitfall of love, and even this she easily avoided. Beautiful as she unquestionably was, admired as she certainly was, if there had been fire in this girl's heart for any man, she kept it either extinguished or well banked for a later time. She had gently declined the heart and hand of every male clerk in the office. She had chosen her own ways, and was not to be diverted. Cool, ambitious, perfectly in hand, she went her way, and bided her time.

Cool, ambitious, perfectly in hand, John Rawn also went his way in life. Two more ambitious souls than these, or two more alike, you scarcely could have found in all the descendants of the two buccaner-monarchs we have named.

And Rawn continually found something responsive in the soul of this young woman, something that never found its way into speech on either side. She was the type of devotion and of efficiency. Gently, without any ostentation, she took upon herself a vast burden of detail; and she added thereto an unobtrusive personal service upon which Rawn unconsciously came more and more to depend. Did he lack any little accustomed implement or appliance, she found it for him forthwith. Did he forget a name, a date, a filing record, it was she who supplied it out of a memory infallible as a fine machine. From this, it was but an easy step to the point where the young woman's unobtrusive aid became useful even beyond business hours. John Rawn had never studied to play any social role. Did he need counsel in any social situation, she tactfully hesitated and modest, at ways was ready to tell him what he should do, what others should do. Had he an appointment, it was she who reminded him of it, and it was she who had made it. Were there personal bills to pay, it was she who paid them. She presided over his personal bank account, and there was no hour when she could not have named the dollars and cents in his balance. Did he wish to avoid an unwelcome visitor, it was arranged for him delicately and without offense. Little by little, she had become indispensable, both in a business and a social way—a fact which John Rawn did not fully realize, but which she knew perfectly well. It had never been within her plan to be anything less than that. She knew, although he did not, that John Rawn also was indispensable to her.

Rawn came from no social station himself, and as we have seen, had grown up ignorant of conventional life, so that now he remained careless of routine now that this young woman should attend in all his visits to the East in business matters—where, in short, he could not have got along without her. There was talk over this—just talk—and much amused comment on the fact that the two seemed so inseparable. Rawn did not know or note it. They literally were running together, hunting in couple in the great chase of ambition. Few knew now what the salary of the president's private secretary represented in round figures. Certainly she dressed as a lady. Certainly also she comported herself as one. It was, in the opinion of John Rawn, no one's business that he registered himself at the New York hotels, and either did not register his companion at all, or else contented himself with the wholly descriptive word "Lady" opposite the number of the room whose bills he told the clerk to charge to his account.

Never was there the slightest ground for suspicion of actual impropriety between John Rawn and Miss Delaware. Abundance of bad taste there certainly was, for Rawn, without explanation or apology to any, always ate in company with her on the streets, at the opera, the play. He showed, in short, that he found her society wholly agreeable upon every possible occasion. If this was in bad taste, if many or most, in the usual guess, put it at the point of impropriety, John Rawn gave himself no concern. The Rawn aristocracy began in him. He founded it, was its Charlemagne, its William the Conqueror, as ruthless, as regardless of others, as selfish, as megalomaniac as the best of kings. Here, therefore, were two aristocrats! They ran well in couple.

It is not to be supposed that a girl so shrewd as Virginia Delaware could fail to realize the full import of all this. She let the slings and arrows fall upon the buckler of her perfect dignity and her perfect beauty, but she

felt their impact. She was perfectly in hand, knew perfectly well her mind, knew perfectly well the price she must pay. She let matters take their course knowing that they were advancing



She Had Chosen Her Own Ways.

safely and surely in one direction, that which she desired. She was more skilled in human nature than her employer, saw deeper into a man's heart than he had ever looked into a woman's!

And then, at last, the life schedule of Virginia Delaware was verified. At last, the inevitable happened.

On one of these many trips to New York, Miss Delaware had been alone in her apartments at the hotel for most of the afternoon. In the evening, before the dinner hour, she was summoned to meet Mr. Rawn in one of the hotel parlors. At once she noted his suppressed excitement. He scarce could wait until they were alone, in a far corner of the room, before explaining to her the cause.

"I don't like to say this, Miss Delaware," he began, "but I've got to do it!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Rawn?" she replied in her usual low and clear tones.

"There's been talk!"

"Talk? About what?"

"Us!"

"About us? What can you mean, Mr. Rawn?" she asked.

"The world is so confoundingly small, my dear girl, that it seems everything you do is known by everybody else. Of course, a man like myself is in the public eye; but we've always minded our business, and it ought not to have been anybody else's business beyond that."

"You disturb me, Mr. Rawn! What has happened?"

"—But now, to-night, now—just a little while ago—I met this fellow Ackerman—you know him—big man in the company—used to be general traffic manager down in St. Louis, on the old railroad where I began—well, he was drunk, and he talked."

"What could he say?"

"He got me by the coat collar and proceeded to tell me how much—how much—well, to tell the truth, he connected your name and mine. If he wasn't drunk—and a director—I'd go down there yet and smash his face for him! What business was it of his? Of course, men don't mind such things so much. But when it comes to you—why, my dear girl!"

The truth has already been stated regarding John Rawn; that, a bachelor, half-dormant for almost half a century, and then putting into business what energy most men put into love and sex, he had passed a life of singular innocence, or ignorance, as to womanhood. He had never countenanced much gossip about women, because he had little interest in the topic. The grande passion marks most of us for its own now and again, or is to be feared now and again; but the grande passion had passed by John Rawn. He was now approaching fifty years of age. Married he had been, and divorced; but he had not yet been in love.

He now spoke to his like, his mate in the hunt, of the opposite sex, a young woman who at that very moment was as beautiful a creature as might have been found on all Manhattan, a woman known in all Manhattan now as the mysterious "Lady of the Lightning," the goddess of the stock certificates of one of the most mammoth American corporations, a creature over whom Manhattan's most critical libertines were crazed—and helpless; moreover, a woman who, out of all those in the great caravanserai at that moment might as well as any have been chosen as the very type of gentle breeding and of gentle womanhood alike. But she had not yet been in love.

"I don't understand, Mr. Rawn," repeated she slowly. "What possible ground could Mr. Ackerman have had? You surely don't think he could have spoken to anyone else?"

"I wouldn't put that past Ackerman when he's drunk. If he'd talk to me, he would to others. And you know perfectly well that when talk begins about a woman, it never stops!"

"No, that is the cruel part of it." Her voice trembled just enough, her eyes became just sufficiently and discreetly moist; she choked a little, just sufficiently.

"It is cruel," she said, with a pathetic little sigh, "but the hand of every man seems to be against a woman. Did you ever stop to think, Mr. Rawn, how helpless, how hopeless, we really are, we women?"

He flung himself closer upon the couch beside her, his face troubled, as she went on with her gentle protest. "All my life I've done right as nearly as I knew, Mr. Rawn. Perhaps I was wrong in coming to trust so much to you—to depend on you so much. It

seemed so natural, that I've just let matters go on, almost without any thought. I've only been anxious to do my work—that was all. But this cruel talk about us—well—it can have but one end. I must go."

"Go? Leave me? You'll do nothing of the sort! I'll take care of this thing myself, I say—I'll stand between you and all that sort of talk."

"Mr. Rawn, I don't understand you."

They sat close together on this brocade couch among many other brocade couches. Crystal and color and gilt and ivory were all about them; pictures, works of art in bronze and marble and costly porcelains. The air was heavy with fragrance, dripping with soft melody and music. She was beautiful, a beautiful young woman. He caught one glance into her wide pathetic eyes ere she turned and bent her head. He caught the fragrance of her hair—that strange fragrance of a woman's hair. Dejected, drooping as she sat, her hands clasped loosely in her lap, he could see the bent column of her beautiful white neck, the curve of her beautiful shoulders, white, flawless.

The flower on her bosom rose and fell in her emotion. She was a woman. She was beautiful. She was young. Something subtle, powerful, mysterious, stole into the air.

She was a woman!

Suddenly this thought came to John Rawn like a sudden blow in the face. It came in a sense hitherto unknown to him in all his life. Now he understood what life might be, saw what life might be! He saw now that all along he had admired this girl and only been unconscious of his admiration. God! what had he lost, all these years! He, John Rawn, had lived all these years, and had not loved!

He reached out timidly and touched her round, white arm, to attract her attention. She flinched from him a trifle, and he also from her. Fire ran through her veins as from a cup of wine, heady and strong. He was a boy, a young man discovering life, the glory of life, the reason, had been here all this time, and he had not suspected it. What need for pity had been wrought! He, John Rawn, never before had known what love might be! He was the last man on Manhattan to go mad over Virginia Delaware.

She drew back from him, seeing the flush upon his face, color rising to her own. Indeed, the power of the man, his sudden, vast passion, were not lost upon her, different as he was from the idol of a young girl's dreams. But Virginia Delaware saw more than the physical image of this man beside her. She knew what he had to share, what power, what wealth, what station. She knew well enough what John Rawn could do; and she gaged her own value to him by the flush on his face, the glitter in his eye.

For one moment she paused. For one moment heredity, the way of her own people, had its way. For one moment she saw another face, different from this flushed and corded one bent near. It was for but a moment; then ambition once more took charge of her soul and her body alike.

The net was thrown. Silently, gently, she tightened its edges with the silken cords. He loved her. The rest was simple. She saw the world unrolling before her like a scroll. All

else was but matter of detail. Above all, she exulted in her strength at this crucial moment. She knew that love is dangerous to a woman, always had feared, as any woman may, that love might sweep her away from her own safe moorings. She rejoiced now to see this danger past, rejoiced to find her pulses cool and even, her voice under control, herself mistress of her self. She did not love him.

But she drew back now apparently startled, apprehensive. "We must go, Mr. Rawn," she said; and would have risen.

He put out a hand, almost rude in its vehemence. "You shall not go! I've got to tell you. Sit down! Listen! We'll separate in one way, yes. You're done now with your clerking days for ever. But you're going to be my wife. I want you; and, by God, I love you!"

His voice rose until she was almost alarmed. She looked about in real apprehension. She turned to see John Rawn's face convulsed, suffused, his protruding lower lip trembling, his eyes almost ready to burst into tears. She might almost have smiled, so easily was it all done for her. Yet this baker's daughter dared to make no mistake in a situation such as this!

"Mr. Rawn," she began, casting down her eyes, although she allowed him to retain her hand, "what can you mean? Surely you must be in jest. Have you no regard for a poor girl who is trying to make her way in the world? I've done my best—and now—"

"Make your way in the world!"

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"I Want You."

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